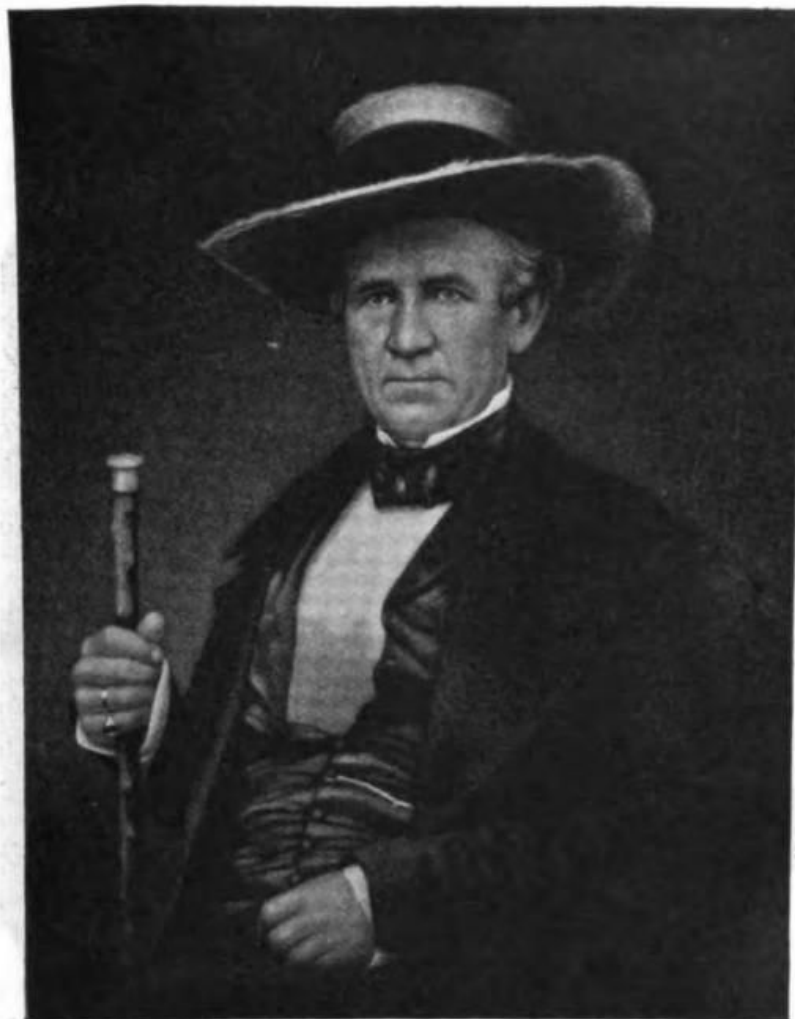




General Sam Houston.
From the engraving by J. C. Buttre.

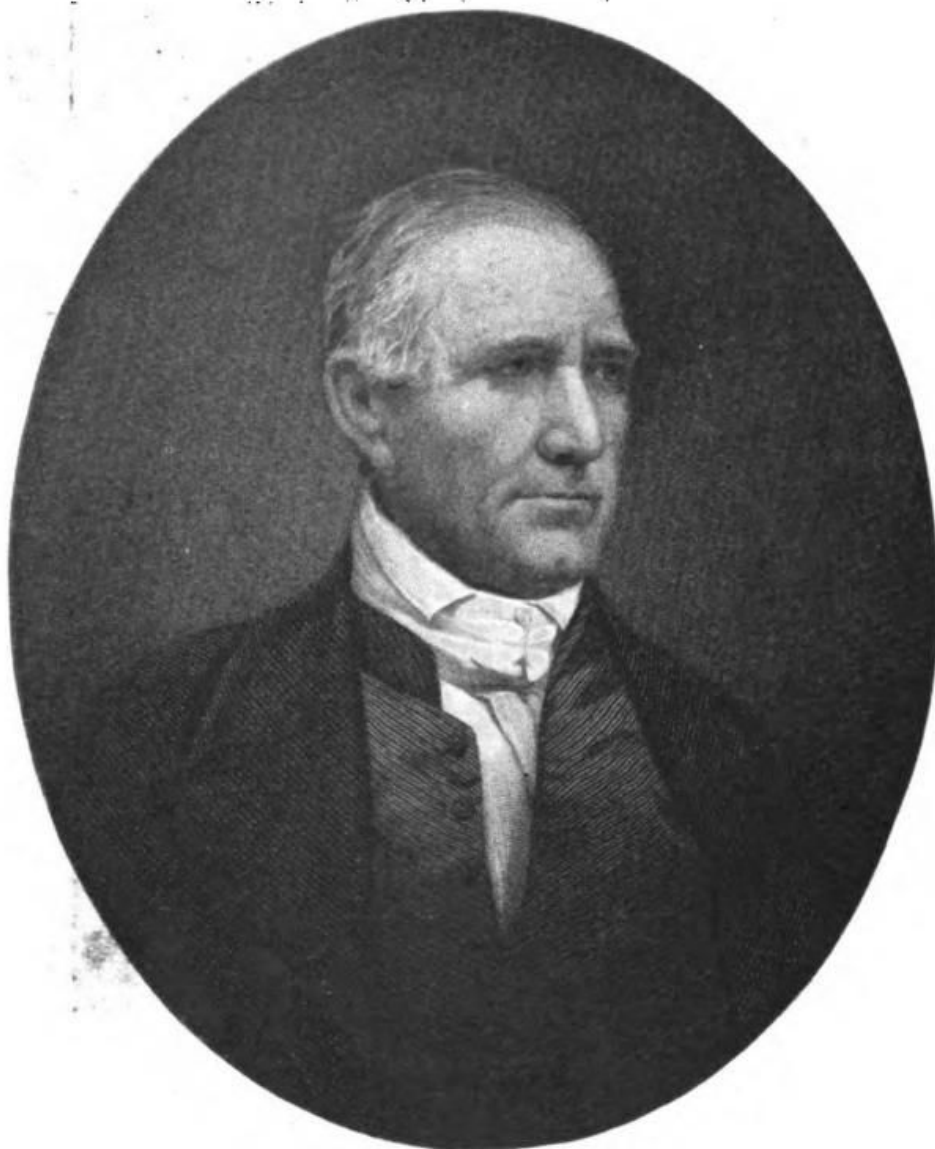
AMERICAN FRONTIER HEROES.

III.—SAM HOUSTON.

IN the career of Sam Houston, of Texas, it is the unexpected that always happens. At one moment he soars, the next he grovels, but he is never commonplace. Imagination it was that distinguished him from his rude playfellows in that Blount County district school of West Tennessee. They grew up to cultivate their farms and die, he to win an immortal name in the annals of this country.

Born near Lexington, Va., in 1793, the son of a Revolutionary soldier, he crossed the mountains at the age of

fourteen, soon after the death of his father. The first notable event in his biography shows the commingled elements of strength and of weakness that always distinguished him. Picture a rather tall, raw-boned boy, with a good-natured Scotch-Irish face, serious-eyed, heavy-jawed, dreamy—and you have Sam Houston at fifteen. The country in which he lived at that time was on the utmost border of civilization. Seven miles farther west was the Tennessee River, the boundary between the settlers and a tribe of



From the engraving by W. J. Edwards from a daguerreotype.

Sam Houston

Cherokee Indians. Trails, rather than roads, connected one log-house with another. Wherever American families are found there a school may also be found, and the dozen or two children in the neighborhood of young Houston's home enjoyed the attention of a border school-master, who doubtless approved the old Western aphorism, "Lickin' and larnin' go together."

To such a teacher the ragged young frontiersman one day displayed a volume entitled "Homer's Iliad, translated from the Original Greek by Alexander Pope."

"I want you to teach me to read this in Greek," said Sam Houston.

The teacher lived to see the boy become famous, and he has left it on record that the future governor and

senator was not a successful student, and took far more interest in marshalling his comrades into lines of mimic war on the playground than in doing sums. In all probability, too, the teacher was as ill prepared to teach Greek as the scholar was to learn it. Therefore the boy's request very likely met with a sarcastic answer. But whatever it was that angered him, young Houston showed his weak side by declaring that he would learn nothing more in that school.

No adequate conception of the boy's character and motives can be formed without bearing in mind this incident. Houston himself authorized the statement, which appeared in an early biography of him, that he had read the translation of the "Iliad" and other heroic verse so faithfully that he was able to repeat long portions of them by heart. The imagination of the youth was taken captive by the combats of Achilles and Hector, Paris and "Menelaus, king of men," before the walls of Troy, and in casting about in his own rough experience for some beings to correspond with those gigantic shadows of the heroic age, his romantic fancy turned to the red men beyond the Tennessee. They lived for glory; they feared not to die.

Young Houston kept his resolve not to go back to school to study. He was one of a family of six sons and three daughters, who lived with their widowed mother, and his elder brothers finding that he was of little use about the farm insisted that he should go to work. He chose to labor in a blacksmith's shop; but his brothers finally got him a position, more to their liking, behind the counter of a country store. Imagine Ulysses weighing out sugar in a dingy, rural shop, and you will understand why the boy rebelled against this arrangement. He was a slave to his own heroic notions. Beyond the river was the realm of romance. He disappeared one day. When next heard of he was living the life of the Cherokee Indian, having been formally adopted into the tribe. It is interesting to note that he carried his "Iliad" with him.

When Houston was in his eighteenth year he resolved to return to white society, and he chose—of all things—the occupation of a school-master. The fact that he got the place seems to indicate that the standard of education was not high in West Tennessee at that time.

But for deeds of valor he yearned, and at length an opportunity for such deeds came to the young man. An Indian war had become necessary—not against the Cherokees, but against the Creeks—and volunteers to serve under General Jackson were called for. Houston enlisted. The battle of Tohopeka, which almost exterminated the Creek Nation, was fought March 27, 1814, when he was twenty-one years of age. He was an ensign in the Thirty-ninth Regiment, which marched right up to the Indian fortifications, firing through the loop-holes upon the savages inside. The first man to scale the rampart, Major Montgomery, was instantly killed. As he fell, Houston took his place at the head of his men and received a barbed arrow deep in his thigh.

"He kept his ground for a moment," says his biographer, Mr. Lester, "till his lieutenant and men were by his side and the warriors had begun to recoil under their desperate onset. Then he called to his lieutenant to extract the arrow, after he had tried in vain to do it himself. The officer made two unsuccessful attempts and failed. 'Try again,' said Houston, the sword with which he was still keeping command raised over his head, 'and if you fail this time, I will smite you to the earth.' With a desperate effort he drew forth the arrow, tearing the flesh as it came. A stream of blood rushed from the place and Houston crossed the breast-works to have his wound dressed."

When the wound had been treated the young man started to return to the fighting, but he was met by General Jackson himself with the injunction not to recross the breastworks in his wounded condition. However, with the usual freedom of the frontier, he disobeyed as soon as his commander's back was turned and took his place at



General Houston.

From a steel-plate made in 1846.

the head of his men. In a sort of hollow down under an overhanging bank a large force of Creeks had taken refuge from the bullets of the soldiers. Houston, under the mistaken impression that his men were following him as he had commanded, charged alone to the very edge of the bank. "Over this mine of desperate savages he paused," says Mr. Parton, the historian, "and looked back for his men. At that moment he received two balls in his right shoulder; his arm fell powerless to his side; he staggered out of the fire, and lay down, totally disabled. His share in that day's work was done."

The wounds thus received never entirely healed. So desperate was his condition that the doctors neglected him, thinking he would never recover.

He was carried home at length on a litter swung between two horses, so emaciated that his own mother said she would not have known him except for his eyes.

Houston fought a duel but once. That was in 1827, after he had become a popular lawyer, and the contestants went across the line into Kentucky to shoot at each other. Houston slightly wounded his antagonist, a General White, who had differed with him as to certain political appointments that had recently been made. A warrant was issued in Kentucky for Houston's arrest, but was never served. The same year he was nominated for the office of Governor of Tennessee. He was elected by a large majority. Indeed, it has been the verdict of many impartial historians that the duel helped elect him.

As before observed, with Sam Houston it was always the unexpected that happened. Having been successfully elected Governor a second time, and being a warm friend of General Jackson, who had never forgotten his courage at Tohopeka, the young man's prospects were considered of the brightest character. But now the mystery of Houston's life occurred. He married Miss Eliza Allen, a young lady of good family in Sumner County. Three months afterward she returned to her parents. He wrote asking her father to plead with her on his behalf, but she would not return to him, and so, taking counsel of no one, Houston resigned from the exalted office he held to seek seclusion in the wigwam of his adopted father, the chief of the tribe of Cherokees that had formerly lived beside the Tennessee. They had since moved beyond the Mississippi River into Arkansas. He adopted the dress and mode of life of the red men, and sought to drown memory in the kind of liquor to be had on an Indian reservation. This is the most humiliating period of Houston's life. The nickname the Indians gave him has been translated into rough Anglo-Saxon as "Big-Drunk." He had nothing more to live for. His future was blighted and his heart broken. Who but Sam Houston would ever have risen from the degradation of being a besotted squaw man on the outskirts of a tribe of Indians?

The lady who had deserted Houston secured a decree of divorce and married again. Houston never uttered a word of reproach against his wife; he never gave even his most intimate friends any intimation as to the secret of the separation.

The career for which Houston was created was yet to be run, however. General Jackson had not forgotten the hero of Tohopeka, and had had some correspondence with him about a design Houston was reported to cherish of conquering Texas. Many believe that the President actually encouraged Houston to undertake the liberation of Texas in order to add it eventually to the Union. At any rate, when the

American settlers in the Southwest raised the Lone Star in 1835, and drove out the Mexicans, Houston appeared among them as a leader. He was probably the most famous Tennessean of his day except the President, and in the Southwest he was so much admired that there had been talk of sending a committee of Texans to invite him to come down to command the army.

All the world knows of the massacres perpetrated by the Mexicans under Santa Anna. There were more than six thousand men in that great army which had come to teach a few hundred Anglo-Saxons the superiority of Spanish blood. Unfortunately the forces of the patriots were scattered. The Alamo was a fortification at San Antonio held by 145 men under Colonel Travis. Colonel Fannin with 530 men was at Goliad, fifty miles to the southeast, and General Houston was at Gonzales, to the northward, with the main body of the army, estimated at one time to contain 1,400 men. Orders were sent by General Houston to the other two commanders to fall back before Santa Anna and join the main body, where every available man was needed for one decisive contest. But while the frontier breeds brave soldiers it also breeds independent ones. A force of 6,000 Mexicans was nothing to 145 fire-eating Texans, shut up behind an eight-foot wall, with a powder magazine and a few bushels of corn. Or perhaps the gallant little garrison in the Alamo never received the order to fall back. They acquitted themselves like men. They fought and died—Davy Crockett, Colonel Bowie, and the rest—not a man was spared to tell the tale of one of the most glorious defences in history.

Colonel Fannin's little band had been depleted by two detachments of 30 and 100 men sent to assist the Texans holding the Alamo, and only sent to their own death. With 400 men he began a late retreat, but was surrounded at the Coleta River, and after fighting all night surrendered. The prisoners were escorted back to Goliad, and next morning, upon orders from Santa Anna,

they were divided into three companies, led out of town in different directions, and shot down.

Such was the state of affairs when the cruel and victorious Mexican army approached General Houston's little band, from which the fearful had deserted, leaving only about seven hundred souls—a veritable Gideon's band.

fore, General Houston restrained them. The battle began at 9 A.M., after the information had been passed along the line that the only bridge affording escape had been cut down. Then with the cry "Remember the Alamo!" those 700 desperate men charged upon their foes.

"The Mexican army was drawn up



General Santa Anna.
From an old wood-cut.

For a month they retreated before the Mexican host, many companies of which were made up of convicts and other criminals. Santa Anna had expected the Revolutionists to retreat; he had no fear of an attack from them. He little dreamed that the one and only purpose of the Texan general was to secure the best fighting odds chance might afford, and then to strike for liberty or death.

The battle of San Jacinto was the making of Sam Houston. It was fought April 21, 1836, at the mouth of the San Jacinto River. Santa Anna was caught in a narrow tract of land between the Buffalo River and the marshes of San Jacinto Bay, with only 1,500 of his troops. Although the Texans had been eager to begin the attack the night be-

in perfect order," says Mr. Lester, "ready to receive the attack, and when the Texans were within about sixty paces, and before they had fired a rifle, a general flash was seen along the Mexican lines, and a storm of bullets went flying over the Texan army. They fired too high, but several balls struck General Houston's horse in the breast, and one ball shattered the General's ankle. The noble animal staggered for a moment, but Houston urged him on."

The fate of Texas was decided within twenty minutes. The battle of San Jacinto turned into a rout and a pursuit. The Texans, many of them, threw away their guns, and with swords and knives proceeded to "Remember the Alamo." Seven hundred Mexicans

were slain and 700 taken prisoners. Among the prisoners was Almonte, one of Santa Anna's generals, and afterward Santa Anna himself was brought in. The Texans lost only six killed and about twenty-five wounded. General Houston, during a conversation with the prisoners, took an ear of common Indian corn out of his pocket : " You will never conquer soldiers who thrive on such rations as this," he said. It had been his only diet for several days.

It was natural that the successful military leader should have been chosen president of the little republic, and that after Texas was admitted to the sisterhood of the United States, he should go to Washington as a senator.

And there occurred the most unexpected thing in Houston's life. He had married a Christian woman by whom he had an interesting family of

children. The man of one book had got as high as Homer's " Iliad " could lift him, and now he turned to an older and a grander work for guidance. During his first term as senator the tall and imposing figure of General Houston used to be seen, enveloped in a Mexican blanket, entering a Baptist church on E Street, near the City Hall. He always occupied a pew near the pulpit, and he usually whiled away the time during the sermon cutting toys out of pieces of pine with his jack-knife for his children. At length, on November 19, 1854, he was baptized by immersion, at the town of Independence, Tex., and the man who had fought for glory at Tohopeka and for liberty at San Jacinto, took his place under the banners of the Prince of Peace. It was a golden sunset to a stormy life.

George Allen Wright.



The City of Houston in its Early Days.

BITTER-SWEET.

SWEETEST things will end in bitter,
 Bitter things in sweet will end ;
 Sweet from bitter aye is fitter ;
 Bitter fruits the taste offend.

Still they fall, these strange mutations,
 While hearts spend their generous heat :
 Sorrows, joys, and perturbations—
 All our lives are bitter-sweet.

William Francis Barnard.